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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 10 September to 24 November 2017

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during the period from 10 September to 24 November 2017, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended in subsequent resolutions, most recently resolution 2361 (2017).

II. Situation in the area of operation and activities of the Force

2. During the reporting period, the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic was maintained, albeit in a volatile environment attributable to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and notwithstanding a number of violations of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces (Disengagement of Forces Agreement) of 1974, which are described below. The Syrian armed forces and non-State armed opposition groups engaged in exchanges of heavy weapons fire in the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo side. Different armed groups, including the listed terrorist group Jabhat Fath al-Sham (formerly the Nusrah Front)[1] and Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid,[2] which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), continued to exchange fire in the UNDOF area of operation. As underscored again by the Security Council in its resolution 2361 (2017), there should be no military activity of any kind in the area of separation.

3. In employing its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed in the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, UNDOF reports all breaches of the ceasefire line that it observes. All incidents of firing into the area of separation and across the ceasefire line, as well as the

[1] In July 2016, the Nusrah Front announced that it had changed its name to Jabhat Fath al Sham and declared that it had cut ties with Al-Qaida.

[2] The merger between Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade and Harakat al Muthana was initially announced on 12 April 2016. On 24 May 2016 open sources reported that both groups were operating under the umbrella name of "Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid". On 20 July 2017, the group was listed by the Security Council, pursuant to annex III of resolution 2368 (2017), as being associated with ISIL or Al-Qaida.

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crossing by individuals of the ceasefire line, are violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. In its regular interaction with both sides, the leadership of UNDOF continued to call upon both parties to exercise restraint and prevent any miscalculations that might lead to an escalation of the situation. That was particularly the case when it responded to incidents of spillover and retaliatory fire.

4. Fighting intensified on 3 November in the northern part of the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo side. Armed groups launched an attack involving heavy machine gun, small arms and indirect fire from the tri-village area of Jubbata al-Khashab, Turunjah and Ufaniyah in the area of separation against pro-Government forces in the vicinity of Hadar, which is largely inhabited by members of the Druze community. On the same day, approximately 200 civilians from Majdal Shams, which is inhabited by members of the Druze community on the Alpha side, gathered at the Israeli technical fence gate leading to United Nations observation post 73, reportedly in support of the Druze community in Hadar. The civilians proceeded to dismantle the Israeli technical fence gate and began to move east of the fence, crossing the ceasefire line and approaching observation post 73. Approximately 150 Israel Defense Forces personnel, equipped with riot control equipment, were deployed in the area. Israel Defense Forces personnel prevented the civilians from moving further, escorting them back to the western side of the technical fence. The civilians left the area later that same evening.

5. Preceding the attack, open sources reported that a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device targeted a pro-Syrian forces checkpoint in Hadar, killing nine people. Observation post 73 reported that a pro-Government forces position was being contested by armed groups from the tri-village area. Because of the proximity of observation post 73 to Hadar, the UNDOF Force Reserve Company was deployed to an area overlooking the observation post in order to monitor the situation. On 8 and 9 September, high explosive rounds, heavy machine gun bursts, cannon rounds and small arms shots were heard and observed taking place between armed groups operating from the tri-village area of Jubbata al-Khashab, Turunjah and Ufaniyah and pro-Government forces in the area of Hadar.

6. During the reporting period, there were three reports, on 18, 19 and 21 October, of spillover fire from the Bravo side across the ceasefire line into the Alpha side. On 18 October, UNDOF received reports from the Israel Defense Forces that high explosive fire from the vicinity of Camp Faouar on the Bravo side had impacted the Alpha side. UNDOF personnel did not observe the spillover fire or visit the impact site of the alleged spillover fire, as the Israel Defense Forces indicated that the site was inside a minefield. UNDOF was, therefore, not in a position to verify the incident. On 19 October, UNDOF observed aerial explosions in the vicinity of United Nations position 12. On the same day, open sources reported that spillover fire from the Bravo side had impacted across the ceasefire line and that the Israel Defense Forces had carried out airstrikes in response to the incident. UNDOF did not observe the alleged incident of spillover fire. On 21 October, UNDOF also received reports from the Israel Defense Forces that spillover fire from the Bravo side involving four separate rockets had impacted west of the ceasefire line. UNDOF did not observe the occurrence of the incident. On that occasion, the Israel Defense Forces requested UNDOF to investigate the incident. UNDOF immediately dispatched a team to investigate the alleged rocket impacts. Owing to the presence of unexploded ordnance at one of the sites of impact of the rockets, the UNDOF team was only able to carry out an investigation at the other three sites. The UNDOF team concluded that 122mm calibre rockets had been fired in the preceding 6 to 12 hours across the ceasefire line and that the rockets appeared to have originated from a north-easterly direction. The investigation team could not determine the exact origin of the rockets or the perpetrators.

7. According to open sources, the Israel Defense Forces responded to the incidents with retaliatory fire across the ceasefire line. UNDOF was unable to confirm the occurrence of those incidents. Syrian officials informed UNDOF that the Syrian armed forces were not responsible for the firing of any artillery rounds or munitions across the ceasefire line and that they were concerned that the actions of the Israel Defense Forces escalated tension across the ceasefire line.

8. On 25 September, UNDOF observed an aerial strike in the vicinity of a Syrian armed forces camp south-east of Camp Faouar. This observation coincided with open source reports of an Israeli airstrike in the same area. On 25 October, United Nations personnel at observation post 73 heard an unmanned aerial vehicle operating in the vicinity of the observation post. On 6 November, UNDOF personnel on Mount Hermon reported hearing an aircraft flying in a north-easterly direction from the Camp Faouar.

9. On Mount Hermon, instances of interaction between Israel Defense Forces personnel and individuals from the Bravo side continued to be observed by UNDOF personnel. UNDOF cannot confirm or verify the nature of these interactions, which typically involved unidentified individuals from the Bravo side, with unloaded mules, approaching the Israeli technical fence as well as Israel Defense Forces positions and returning to the Bravo side with mules carrying unidentified supplies. On 13 separate occasions, 3 in September and 10 in October, UNDOF observed a total of 229 mules and 127 individuals involved in such interactions. On 21 October, an Observer Group Golan patrol observed boxes with clear ammunition markings in the vicinity of a United Nations temporary observation post on the Alpha side.

10. During the reporting period, UNDOF also observed 16 transborder movements between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic in September, involving 49 individuals, and 2 such movements in October. On 27 October, armed individuals stopped an UNDOF resupply convoy in the Mount Hermon complex in the area of separation and demanded food and water. The UNDOF troops refused to comply with the request and as the convoy proceeded to move, small arms fire in the air was heard.

11. In addition, UNDOF continued to observe, on a daily basis, the crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians, primarily shepherds, from the Bravo side to the Alpha side. On 6 November, in the vicinity of observation post 54, in the southern part of the area of separation, civilians from the Bravo side were observed entering on foot an Israel Defense Forces position on the Alpha side and subsequently leaving, crossing the ceasefire line and moving towards Al Mullaqah on the Bravo side. The Israel Defense Forces informed UNDOF that there was a hospital located adjacent to their position, which was providing humanitarian assistance to local civilians.

12. In the context of the ongoing Syrian conflict, the northern part of the area of separation and limitation saw fighting of medium- and high-level intensity between the Syrian armed forces and armed groups, particularly in the Bayt Jinn pocket area, which consists of the towns of Bayt Jinn, Mazra'at Bayt Jinn and Mughur al-Mir. The armed groups Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and Ahrar al-Sham are reportedly in control of the Bayt Jinn pocket area. During the reporting period, the Syrian armed forces engaged in indirect fire and aerial strikes against the armed groups, with the fighting impacting the surrounding towns of Arneh, Durbol, Hinah and Harfa.

13. On 28 September, the Syrian armed forces and armed groups in Bayt Jinn engaged in heavy fighting. UNDOF observed and heard high explosive rounds impacting the Bayt Jinn area and also landing in the central part of the area of separation. During the fighting, several high explosive rounds impacted within 50 to 150 metres of Camp Faouar, forcing UNDOF personnel to move into bunkers. On the same day, Observer Group Golan personnel at the United Nations temporary

observation post on Mount Hermon observed six heavy machine gun rounds impact within five metres of their observation post. The UNDOF rapid reaction group based on Mount Hermon deployed to the observation post and safely extracted the military observers and conveyed them to the United Nations Mount Hermon Base position.

14. On 6 October, Observer Group Golan personnel at a temporary position on Mount Hermon observed small rounds impacting close to their position. The UNDOF rapid reaction group based on Mount Hermon deployed to the location and safely extracted the military observers and conveyed them to the United Nations Mount Hermon Base position. Because of the security situation, presence at two temporary observation posts on Mount Hermon was suspended temporarily and has not been reinstated to date.

15. The fighting between armed groups and the Syrian armed forces in the central part of the areas of separation and limitation occurred at medium- to low-level intensity. Throughout the reporting period, an artillery gun was observed at a firing position in the vicinity of Qunaytirah firing north at various times. On 12 October, more than 90 high explosive impacts were heard in the central part of the area of separation. On 24 October, exchanges of heavy machine gun and small arms fire were heard and observed in the areas between Batinah and Khan Arnabah. On 27 October, two armed elements were observed standing in front of a house approximately 900 metres north of United Nations observation post 51 in the Qahtaniyah area; one of the armed elements was observed firing his weapon in the general direction of the observation post. On 4 November, United Nations personnel at observation post 51 went into bunkers for a short period after they heard incoming artillery fire close to their post. On 11 November, three high explosive rounds landed in the vicinity of an UNDOF reconnaissance patrol close to observation post 56.

16. In the southern part of the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side, which remain, for the most part, under the control of non-State armed groups, including those listed by the Security Council as terrorist groups, fighting continued between armed groups, especially Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid, on one side, and the Free Syrian Army and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, on the other. According to open sources, the fighting was concentrated around the area of Tasil in the area of limitation. There was a spike in military activities on 24 October, with heavy explosive rounds and heavy machine gun bursts heard approximately 10 kilometres south-east of observation post 54 and position 80. In the area around Yarmouk Basin, in the southern part of the area of separation, there were open source reports of Israeli airstrikes targeting areas in Sahaem al-Jawlan, in which 12 personnel of Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid were reportedly killed.

17. The military violations on the Alpha side included 29 reports of M109 self-propelled guns, Iron Dome systems, missile carriers, light armoured vehicles and armoured patrol vehicles within the 10-kilometre zone, which are considered unauthorized military equipment in the area of limitation. There were 25 restrictions of movement of UNDOF by the Israel Defense Forces recorded during the reporting period.

18. Engagement between UNDOF and the Israel Defense Forces continued to endeavour to reduce delays and challenges experienced by United Nations personnel in crossing through the technical fence to United Nations observation posts and positions.

19. UNDOF protested all violations of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement that it observed to both parties, including the crossing of the ceasefire line by civilians from the Bravo side, the presence of unauthorized equipment and armed individuals in the area of separation and firing into the area of separation. UNDOF

continued to remind the parties of their obligation to scrupulously abide by the terms of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground and to extend all cooperation to UNDOF in the fulfilment of the tasks that it is obligated to fulfil under its mandate.

20. During the reporting period, UNDOF observed several locations where 437 tents and other structures appeared to have been set up for internally displaced persons in the area of separation and in its proximity. The number of people in the camps could not be ascertained and appeared to fluctuate. Owing to the closure of the established crossing point at Qunaytirah between the Alpha and Bravo sides since late August 2014, UNDOF remains unable to facilitate, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, humanitarian crossings, including for students, between the two sides.

21. Since its temporary relocation from a number of positions in September 2014, and pending its full return to the area of separation, UNDOF has continued to maintain visibility, albeit limited, of the area of separation and the ceasefire line from its positions on Mount Hermon, Camp Faouar, position 80 in the southern part of the area of separation and position 22 on the Alpha side. UNDOF operations continued to be supported by United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observers in Observer Group Golan, who are under the operational control of UNDOF and have maintained five fixed and four temporary observation posts along the Alpha line, as well as four temporary observation posts on Mount Hermon. The focus of the activities of Observer Group Golan was on continuous static observation and situational awareness. Observer Group Golan-Damascus also continued operations on Mount Hermon. The operations on Mount Hermon will be suspended with the onset of winter and resumed in the spring.

22. Through Observer Group Golan, UNDOF continued to carry out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the area of limitation on the Alpha side. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied the inspection teams. Inspections in the area of limitation on the Bravo side remained suspended owing to the security situation.

23. UNDOF, in consultation with both parties, continued to review the situation in the area of separation to assess whether the conditions on the ground permitted the return to vacated positions in the area of separation. In this regard, UNDOF conducted assessment visits and continuously monitored the prevailing security situation in the area of separation, mainly in the vicinity of United Nations observation posts 52, 56, 71 and 72 and positions 10 and 16.

24. During the reporting period, UNDOF made progress towards the limited return to Bravo side operations, in line with the phased UNDOF plan. Following the completion of phase 1 of the plan, with the re-establishment of the UNDOF presence at Camp Faouar on 14 November 2016, UNDOF continued to develop the infrastructure at Camp Faouar and steadily improve the living conditions at the camp. The security and defence of the camp have been continuously practiced, and all deployed elements have been integrated into a cohesive and effective component, with clear command and control mechanisms. The deployment of the remainder of the mechanized infantry company from Nepal occurred at the end of September, resulting in the activation of phase 2 of the plan from 25 September.

25. Conditions permitting, phase 2 of the plan will involve, over a period of six to eight months, an initial period of resumption of limited patrolling of the northern part of the area of separation by the Nepalese mechanized infantry company from Camp Faouar. This phase will also involve the refurbishment of facilities and security infrastructure of select observation posts in the area of separation. The return of the headquarters of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan from their

temporary headquarters in Ya'fur, Damascus, and the return of the Force Reserve Company from Camp Ziouani to Camp Faouar are planned to take place during phase 3. The reoccupation of observation posts 56, 71 and 72 are also envisaged for phase 3. Observer Group Golan will not be deployed at observation posts on a permanent basis until such time as the security conditions permit and adequate accommodation and appropriate force protection measures are in place.

26. In accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolution 2361 (2017) and the UNDOF operational concept, the mission continued its efforts to deploy appropriate technology to ensure the safety and security of UNDOF personnel and equipment. A surveillance trailer has been deployed on the Alpha side to Camp Ziouani and position 22 and another has been deployed to Camp Faouar. A training programme has been initiated on the use of the equipment by UNDOF personnel. Additional surveillance trailers are expected to be deployed in other United Nations posts. In addition, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations continued to engage with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Government of Israel regarding the "sense and warn" system, the technical specifications of which were shared with the parties in July 2017. The responses of the parties are still pending. The Security Council will continue to be updated, as necessary, on progress made and challenges encountered in this respect.

27. UNDOF continued to resupply its positions on Mount Hermon and Camp Faouar from Damascus. On 26 October, the UNDOF daily convoy moving from Camp Faouar to Ya'fur, Damascus, on the Al Salam highway observed two impacts of indirect fire within 2 km of the highway in the area of limitation. The convoy continued along its route to Ya'fur. This was the fifth such incident this year along this route. UNDOF continuously monitors the situation and takes the necessary precautionary measures in planning and conducting its convoys along main supply route 7 and Al Salam highway.

28. UNDOF followed closely the developments related to the de-escalation zone in the south-west part of the Syrian Arab Republic, which was established in accordance with an agreement reached on 9 July between Jordan, the Russian Federation and the United States of America. Given the partial overlap between the de-escalation zone and the UNDOF area of operation, UNDOF maintained contact with all relevant interlocutors to seek clarity with regard to the arrangements envisaged under the agreement and their potential implications for UNDOF. The continuation of these contacts is particularly important in facilitating the implementation of the UNDOF mandate, the freedom of movement of the Force as well as the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

29. As at 9 November, UNDOF comprised 976 troops, including 30 women. Troops are currently deployed from Bhutan (3), Czechia (2), Fiji (305), Finland (2), India (189), Ireland (136), Nepal (337) and the Netherlands (2). In addition, 70 military observers from UNTSO/Observer Group Golan, including 8 women, assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

30. In its resolution 2361 (2017), the Security Council called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973), decided to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months until 31 December 2017 and requested the Secretary-General to report every 90 days on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement resolution 338 (1973). The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts made at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), is addressed in my report on the situation

in the Middle East (A/72/333), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 71/24 on the Syrian Golan and 71/25 on Jerusalem.

31. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties. The Syrian conflict is further reducing the prospects for their resumption and for progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions.

IV. Financial aspects

32. The General Assembly, by its resolution 71/306 appropriated the amount of $57.7 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018.

33. As at 14 November 2017, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNDOF amounted to $11.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $1,812.9 million.

34. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 July 2017, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 30 June 2017, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

V. Observations

35. I note with concern the recent military activity across the ceasefire line, in particular the incidents of spillover and retaliatory fire that occurred in October. All military activities across the ceasefire line are of deep concern. They jeopardize the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and have the potential to escalate tensions. I encourage members of the Security Council to support efforts to sensitize both parties and regional stakeholders to the risks of escalation and the need to preserve the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic.

36. As previously reported by UNDOF, the Israel Defense Forces hold the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic responsible for any spillover fire incidents that impact the Alpha side, regardless of the point of origin. It remains critical that the parties maintain their liaison with UNDOF, in the first instance, to prevent any escalation of the situation across the ceasefire line. All violations of the ceasefire line increase tensions between the signatories of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. For its part, the United Nations will maintain its efforts to ensure that the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic continues to hold.

37. I remain gravely concerned by the prevailing security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its implications for the stability of the wider region. The continued fighting on the Bravo side between the Syrian armed forces and armed groups, and between different armed groups, including listed terrorist groups, such as Jabhat Fath al-Sham, and ISIL affiliates, such as Jaysh Khalid Ibn al-Walid, in the southern part of the UNDOF area of operation, jeopardize the long-term ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and continue to significantly affect UNDOF mandate implementation and the UNDOF area of operation.

38. There should be no military forces in the area of separation other than those of UNDOF. I call upon all parties to the Syrian conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including in the UNDOF area of operation, and to remove all military equipment and all armed personnel from the area of separation.

39. Interaction between the Israel Defense Forces and unidentified individuals from the Bravo side, including in the area of Mount Hermon, has the potential to lead to clashes between armed elements and the Syrian armed forces. I reiterate my call to both parties to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement regarding the requirement to maintain stability in the area. All military activities in the area of separation conducted by any actor pose a risk to the ceasefire and to the local civilian population, in addition to the United Nations personnel on the ground. I call upon all parties to take all measures necessary to protect civilians.

40. The Israel Defense Forces should refrain from firing across the ceasefire line. The firing across the ceasefire line by the Israel Defense Forces has the potential to escalate tensions between the two sides. The continued presence of unauthorized weapons and equipment in the area of limitation on the Alpha side is also of concern.

41. As UNDOF continues to consolidate its presence at Camp Faouar and maintains its efforts to intensify its operations in the area of separation, it remains critical that the safety and security of United Nations personnel be assured. The circumstances under which the troops and military observers are operating remain complex and challenging, and require continued vigilance and risk mitigation measures. I renew my call on the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to fulfil its primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the Bravo side. I also renew my call on countries with influence to strongly and urgently convey to the armed groups in the UNDOF area of operation the imperative to cease any action in violation of the Disengagement of Forces Agreement, including actions that jeopardize the safety and security of United Nations personnel, and to enable UNDOF to carry out its mandate safely and securely.

42. Both Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic have stated their continued commitment to the Disengagement of Forces Agreement and support for the presence of UNDOF in calling for a return to vacated positions in the area of separation. The full return of UNDOF to the area of separation remains a priority for the mission, conditions permitting.

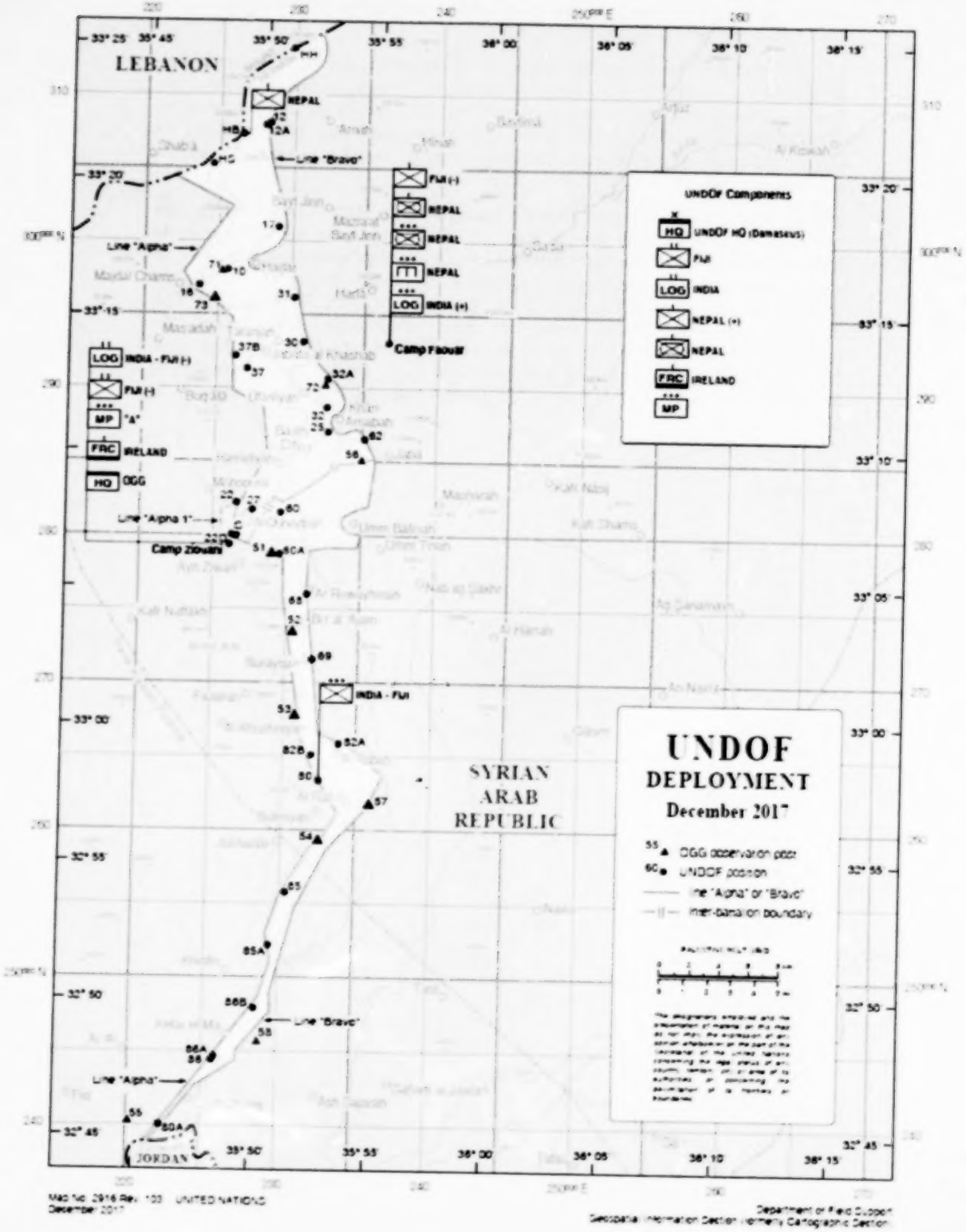
43. It is equally important that the Security Council continue to bring to bear its influence on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate in a safe and secure manner and is allowed to operate freely in accordance with the Disengagement of Forces Agreement. As long as the area of separation remains militarized and the presence of armed groups and/or Syrian armed forces continues, UNDOF will only fulfil its mandate in a limited manner. It is essential that this issue be addressed by the parties to the Agreement and in the wider framework of the Syrian political process. Furthermore, the reopening of the regular Qunaytirah crossing point would benefit the ability of UNDOF to implement its mandate. It is also necessary for UNDOF to continue to have at its disposal all means and resources necessary for it to return fully to the area of separation, conditions permitting.

44. The confidence and commitment of troop-contributing countries with respect to UNDOF remains a key factor in the mission's ability to carry out its mandate. I continue to count on the support of troop-contributing countries as UNDOF proceeds with its agreed plan for increased operations in the area of separation. I am grateful to the Governments of Bhutan, Czechia, Fiji, Finland, India, Ireland, Nepal and the Netherlands for their contributions, their commitment, their resolve and

their consummate professionalism. I am also thankful to the Member States contributing military observers to UNTSO.

45. I consider the continued presence of UNDOF in the area to be essential, and all the more so under the prevailing circumstances. I therefore recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the Force for a further period of six months, until 30 June 2018. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has given its assent to the proposed extension. The Government of Israel also has expressed its agreement.

46. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to Major General Jai Shanker Menon, who completed his tour of duty on 30 September, for his dedication and leadership of UNDOF during a difficult period for the mission. I also wish to express appreciation to the military and civilian personnel serving in UNDOF and the military observers in Observer Group Golan, who continue to perform with efficiency and commitment, under extremely challenging circumstances, the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to use its best efforts to carry out its mandate under the leadership of Major General Francis Vib-Sanziri, who assumed the leadership of UNDOF on 11 November.


LEBANON
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
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DEPLOYMENT
December 2017
OGG observation post
UNDOF position
line "Alpha" or "Bravo"
inter-battalion boundary
Map No. 2916 Rev. 100 UNITED NATIONS
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